THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Yes Sir.

Damage to Shrines in Najaf and Karbala

967. SHRI SHAHID SIDDIQUI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of reports regarding holi shrines of Muslims being damaged in Najaf and Karbala which has agitated Indians generally and Shia Muslims particularly; and

(b) whether Government have enquired about the protection of these shrines as they are of great concern to Indian Muslims?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes.

(b) Yes. Government have emphasized the imperative need to respect the religious sentiments and cultural sensitivities by all the concerned in Iraq.

Death of Indians in Iraqi blasts

968. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that many foreigners have been killed in various blasts in Iraq;

(b) whether any Indian has also fallen victim in such incidents;

(c) if so, the details thereof and the compensation paid to next of kin of the deceased; and

(d) the steps taken by Government to ensure safety of Indians living in Iraq?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Government have seen reports of death of foreigners in various blasts in Iraq.

(b) Yes.

(c) Seven Indians are known to have died and three injured in such incidents. Compensation would be paid to the next of kin of the deceased in terms of the employment contract.

(d) Government have tightened the emigration control to prevent Indian workers from being misled into employment in Iraq. Heads of Indian Mission in Iraq and countries neighbouring Iraq have been instructed to give top priority to all matters concerning Indian nationals in Iraq and to pursue actively with local authorities and employers of Indians for ensuring safety and well being of Indians living in Iraq and to give assistance and guidance to those Indian nationals wanting to return to India. In Kuwait, our Mission has established contacts with the local companies who have deployed their Indian employees on work in Iraq and has taken steps to ensure that such Indian workers are made aware of the conditions in Iraq and provided insurance cover and safety arrangements. The Government have taken up with Jordan and Kuwait for facilitating transit of Indians leaving Iraq. In Iraq, officials of our Mission visit various camps from time to time to ascertain well being and safety of Indians.

Indian ex-servicemen in Iraq

†969. SHRI SURESH BHARDWAJ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any decision to send Indian troops to Iraq;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether placement agencies are sending ex-servicemen to Iraq illegally; and

(d) if Government are aware of it, the action being taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Government have seen reports about recruiting agents sending ex-servicemen to Iraq in violation of emigration norms. The

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.